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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 000865

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES REDSHIRT PROTESTS WITH PRIVY
COUNCIL PRESIDENT AND EX-PM THAKSIN

REF: A. BANGKOK 790 (THAKSIN LASHES OUT)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 208 (ABHISIT'S START)
[1](#)C. 08 BANGKOK 3167 (THAKSIN CONVICTED)
[1](#)D. 07 BANGKOK 4003 (VIOLENCE AT PREM'S HOUSE)

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason: 1.4 (b and d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)1. (C) The Ambassador told Privy Council President Prem Tinsulanonda on April 2 that the USG had informed anti-government "redshirt" protest leaders of our opposition to the use of violence. Prem said the RTG was committed to using peaceful and legal means; he believed the only way to resolve the political situation was for former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to return to Thailand and begin serving his prison sentence for his 2008 conviction. Prem spoke positively about Abhisit and said it would benefit Thailand if Abhisit remains in office for a long term. The Ambassador expressed concern about the RTG's crackdown on persons accused of lese majeste. On April 3, Thaksin phoned the Ambassador to request the Ambassador's perspective on the political situation. Thaksin denounced the current Thai government and claimed the redshirt movement would remain peaceful but nevertheless mark a turning point in Thai history. Thaksin acknowledged he would have difficulty returning to Thailand to engage in politics; he also said he might travel to the U.S. in the coming months but intended not to denounce the RTG publicly from the U.S.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: We welcome Prem's assurance that the RTG is seeking to address the redshirt rallies through peaceful and legal means. While Thaksin is breaking some conventions of Thai politics with his blunt attacks on political enemies, the redshirts appear for now not to be trying to foment chaos in the manner of the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD)'s takeover of the Bangkok airports in late 2008. End Summary and Comment.

PREM: THAKSIN LIES

[1](#)3. (C) The Ambassador on April 2 called on Privy Council President Prem Tinsulanonda at Prem's residence. Discussing the ongoing anti-government "redshirt" demonstrations at Government House, Prem remarked that former Prime Minister

Thaksin Shinawatra, who was appearing each evening to address supporters via video link, was lying to the Thai public about the 2006 coup. Prem admitted to the Ambassador that he had met with Army Commander Sonthi Boonyaratglin prior to the coup, but Prem denied that he had backed the seizure of power, as Thaksin alleged (ref A). Prem asserted that he did not feel sympathetic toward either the redshirts or the PAD, which had used demonstrations to undermine Thaksin prior to the coup and then again after a pro-Thaksin government took power in early 2008.

USG POSITION

14. (C) The Ambassador told Prem that we had told the redshirts that we opposed violence -- just as we had delivered that message to the PAD when it was organizing demonstrations. Prem said he appreciated the Ambassador's message. The Ambassador further noted that if the RTG was likely to pursue charges against leading redshirt activist Jakrapob Penkair, it would appear more appropriate to focus on Jakrapob's incitement of a violent mob outside of Prem's house in mid-2007 (ref D), rather than on the vague remarks Jakrapob made subsequently at the Foreign Correspondents Club about the Thai patronage system. (Note: Prosecutors will decide on April 29 whether to forward lese majeste charges against Jakrapob to the court.) The Ambassador said the latter approach would make it appear as though the RTG was stifling free speech, and he mentioned concern in general about the RTG's strict crackdown on lese majeste. Prem agreed that it would be more appropriate to focus on the violent demonstration, and he took on board the broader point about lese majeste.

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PREM ON THE WAY FORWARD

15. (C) Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban was managing the RTG response to the redshirt demonstrations, Prem explained. Prem said that the RTG would not rush to bring the demonstrations to an end; its approach would be both peaceful and legal. (Note: A civil court ruled March 31 that the redshirts must allow greater access to the Government House compound; the redshirts are appealing that order.)

16. (C) Prem said it was important that Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva remain in office for a long period of time. Abhisit was performing well, as he focused on leading the nation during difficult times, rather than becoming preoccupied with his own political survival, like some of his predecessors (e.g., Samak Sundaravej and Somchai Wongsawat). Noting that some critics claimed Abhisit was not sufficiently forceful, Prem acknowledged that Abhisit was relatively young to hold the premiership, but Prem said he was learning well. (Note: This assessment tracks with the view Prem expressed to the Ambassador in January -- ref B.)

17. (C) The way out of the current political crisis, Prem opined, was for Thaksin to return to Thailand and begin serving his sentence for his October 2008 conviction (ref C). Prem asked the Ambassador if he knew Thaksin's whereabouts. When the Ambassador said he did not, Prem noted the RTG should certainly pursue Thaksin's extradition. This effort might upset the redshirts, but it was the only way for Thailand to move forward.

THAKSIN ON THE RTG AND THE REDSHIRT MOVEMENT

18. (C) On April 3, Thaksin phoned the Ambassador from Dubai. Speaking first in general terms, Thaksin said that Thailand needed "true democracy," and that the Thai government currently served only the interests of the elite. The system under the 1997 Constitution was better than the current one,

as it had allowed a strong Prime Minister to head a democratic government. Thais now went into politics only to make money, Thaksin lamented.

¶9. (C) Thaksin said that Thais would be increasingly dissatisfied with the current government, as the truth (read: about its undemocratic nature) emerged. Thaksin said an April 8 redshirt rally would draw the largest crowd Thailand had ever seen and would mark a turning point in Thai history. The redshirt movement was much larger than Thaksin himself. Thaksin said that many Thais were underestimating the movement because of the prior organizing role of Buriram politician Newin Chidchob, who simply paid people to attend demonstrations. Now, however, the redshirt movement was driven by much more than money.

¶10. (C) Having noticed from press coverage that the Ambassador had called on Prem, Thaksin asked the Ambassador to describe Prem's views. The Ambassador noted Prem's claim of neutrality and Prem's opinion that Thaksin should return to face justice in Thailand as the only means to resolve the current political impasse. Thaksin complained that Prem had met in late 2006 with Thaksin's then-wife, Potjaman, but had failed to ensure that the Shinawatra family received fair treatment. Thaksin also remarked that his efforts to lobby the Palace through an intermediary appeared not to be bearing fruit. He complained that Deputy Prime Minister Suthep, leading the government response to the redshirt movement, was a "crook," dishonest, and a "pure politician." Thaksin denied that Suthep had contacted him; rather, he alleged Suthep was pressuring the police to build a legal case against Thaksin on unjust charges.

¶11. (C) The Ambassador told Thaksin that we had told redshirt leaders of our opposition to violence. Thaksin insisted that the redshirt movement would remain peaceful and "polite." In his speech on the evening of April 3, Thaksin would stress the need for the redshirts to act peacefully.

THAKSIN'S TRAVELS AND OUTLOOK

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¶12. (C) The Ambassador asked Thaksin's travel schedule; Thaksin said he would visit Africa, Europe, Nicaragua, and Cuba. He was interested in exploring business opportunities in Africa, especially in gold mining. Thaksin said he hoped to visit the U.S. for a week in May or June, and he asked whether he would likely encounter problems there. The Ambassador explained Thaksin's valid visa allowed him to present himself at a U.S. port of entry, although, as with any U.S. visa, it did not guarantee admission into the U.S. The Ambassador reminded Thaksin of the U.S.-Thai extradition treaty and suggested Thaksin exercise his own judgment about whether to travel there. The Ambassador acknowledged Thaksin's right to free speech but observed that, were Thaksin to make controversial political speeches while in the U.S., that could hurt Thaksin's image in the U.S. and cause awkwardness in the U.S.-Thai relationship. Thaksin assured the Ambassador he would not make such speeches from the U.S.

¶13. (C) Thaksin asked the Ambassador's view of Thaksin's likely ability to return to Thailand. The Ambassador said that Thaksin's public accusations that Privy Councilors Prem and Surayud had supported the 2006 coup appeared to make it impossible that Thaksin would be able to receive a royal pardon or amnesty, so it appeared Thaksin could not return to Thailand for the purpose of engaging in political activity in the near term. Thaksin acknowledged the Ambassador's logic but asked if the Ambassador felt the redshirt movement might not ease Thaksin's predicament. The Ambassador observed that even the People's Alliance for Democracy had only been able to prevail after many months of determined political action, and if the redshirt movement hoped to emulate the PAD, it would surely be a long process, and one that should remain

peaceful.
JOHN